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ASMFC RELEASES WINTER FLOUNDER PID FOR PUBLIC COMMENT
Massachusetts to Hold Hearing on August 7

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Winter Flounder Management Board has approved the Public Information Document (PID) for Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Inshore Stocks of Winter Flounder for public review and comment. In addition to providing information on winter flounder management, commercial and recreational fisheries, and stock status, the PID outlines several issues for public comment. These include updating plan objectives; redefining plan targets, thresholds, and rebuilding goals; assessing habitat needs; and standardizing the management programs of the Commission and New England Fishery Management Council. The PID also seeks input on broader management and research issues such as declining recruitment, the effects of predation on winter flounder, and the inshore/offshore movements of winter flounder stocks at lower levels of biomass.

The Commission is currently amending the FMP to revise the objectives of the management program, update overfishing definitions and fishing mortality targets, and identify FMP compliance criteria as mandated by the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act of 1993. Updated overfishing definitions and fishing mortality targets are needed based on the results of the most recent stock assessments for the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) and Gulf of Maine (GOM) winter flounder stocks. Specifically, the SNE/MA stock is overfished and overfishing is occurring, and a reduction in fishing mortality is needed to rebuild the stock to sustainable levels of biomass. While the GOM stock was determined to be not overfished and overfishing is not occurring, limited data and a lack of observed fish from the northern part of the species range raises concern about the possibility of localized depletion in inshore areas north of Massachusetts.

The PID is the first step in the amendment process. Following the public comment period and consideration of this input from the Board, the Commission will begin drafting Amendment 1 to the FMP. Fishermen and other interested groups are encouraged to provide input on the PID, either through attending public hearings or providing written comments. Copies of the PID can be obtained by contacting the Commission at (202) 289-6400 or via the Commission's website at www.asmfc.org.

A public hearing has been scheduled in Massachusetts for **Thursday, August 7th (7PM) at the Forestdale School** (151 Route 130, Forestdale, MA 02644).

Public comment will be accepted until Friday, August 22, 2003, and should be forwarded to Lydia Munger, Winter Flounder Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, 1444 'Eye' Street, NW, Sixth Floor, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 289-6051 (FAX) or at lmunger@asmfc.org.

For more information, please contact Lydia Munger at (202) 289-6400.